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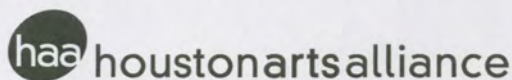
Tuesday, December 4, 2007, 8:00 p.m.

STUDE CONCERT HALL

ALICE PRATT BROWN HALL

RICE UNIVERSITY

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CONCERTANTE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

~ PROGRAM ~

String Sextet from the opera "Capriccio," Op. 85

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

XIAO-DONG WANG, ITTAI SHAPIRA, VIOLIN

RACHEL SHAPIRO, ARA GREGORIAN, VIOLA

ALEXIS PIA GERLACH, ZVI PLESSER, CELLO

Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (Transfigured Night)

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874-1951)

Sehr langsam

Breiter

Schwer betont

Sehr breit und langsam

Sehr rubig

XIAO-DONG WANG, ITTAI SHAPIRA, VIOLIN

RACHEL SHAPIRO, ARA GREGORIAN, VIOLA

ALEXIS PIA GERLACH, ZVI PLESSER, CELLO

~ INTERMISSION ~

Octet in F Major for Strings and Winds, Op. 166, D. 803 (1824)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Adagio – Allegro – Più allegro

Adagio

Allegro vivace – Trio – Allegro vivace

Andante – Variation I-VI. Variation VII. Un poco più mosso – Più lento

Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio – Menuetto – Coda

Andante molto – Allegro – Andante molto – Allegro molto

XIAO-DONG WANG, ITTAI SHAPIRA, VIOLIN

RACHEL SHAPIRO, VIOLA

ZVI PLESSER, CELLO

KURT MUROI, BASS

ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN, CLARINET

SHINYEE NA, BASSOON

CHEZY NIR, FRENCH HORN

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RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)
String Sextet from the opera "Capriccio," Op. 85

This unique "piece within a piece" opens Strauss's last opera, the one-act *Capriccio* (1940-41). The Sextet is heard offstage as the opera's main characters, the composer Flamand and the poet Olivier, discuss the relative merit of words and music in opera, a favorite subject of Strauss – who aptly called the sextet "a conversation piece." Flamand watches his employer and beloved, the Countess Madeleine, to determine her reaction to his piece. While writing about writing – and certainly composing about composing – can be deadly, in the case of *Capriccio* it somehow works. Paul Hosely, in his note accompanying the recent Philadelphia orchestra member performance of the Sextet, calls *Capriccio* "one of the composer's most intimate and effortlessly melodic theatre pieces," a statement corroborated by Strauss himself when he called it "a second *Rosenkavlier* without the longeurs." None of his opera scores, says Strauss scholar Michael Kennedy, is "more refined, more translucent, more elegant, more varied..." Thus it is with the Sextet. In the final debate over the significance of words and music in opera, it would seem that music, absolute music, wins.

Program note © by Lucy Miller, 2001

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG
Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (Transfigured Night)

(after a poem from 'Weib und Welt' by Richard Dehmel)

Sehr langsam (Stanza 1)

Etwas bewegter (Stanza 2)

Schwer betont (Stanza 3)

Sehr breit und langsam (Stanza 4)

Sehr ruhig (Stanza 5)

The "unnamed contemporary" quoted by Charles Rosen in his *Schoenberg* (1976) gives a harsh sentence to Schoenberg's youthful *Verklärte Nacht*: "It sounds as if someone had smeared the score of *Tristan* while it was still wet." Yet for all its post-Wagnerian excess, the work remains the only Schoenberg heard regularly in chamber music halls, to say nothing of its moments of sheer beauty and inventiveness. It is important to remember

that it is, first of all, a youthful work, written in 1899 when Schoenberg was but twenty-five. Secondly, the structure of the work mirrors not only Wagner by also Wagner's anti-self, Johannes Brahms. From Wagner, Schoenberg took his chromatic harmonies and from Brahms his technique of developing variation. Singular to Schoenberg, however, is the development of the tone poem. While he may have looked to Richard Strauss for inspiration on that form, no one had yet translated it for chamber music, a challenging task. With that he moved in new directions, possibly even toward his later music which is such a departure from the melodic or *tonal*, if you will, *Verklärte Nacht*.

Played without interruption, the five sections of the work correspond to the five stanzas of Richard Dehmel's poem of 1896, which tells the story of the distraught young woman confessing to her lover that she carries another man's child. The man responds that the child, because of their love, will be transformed into his, and the lovers continue through the "high, light night" transfigured.

In the first section, the young woman's despair is echoed by the dark sonorities of the second viola and cello. The second movement with its motivic developments further captures her despair, this time agitated as she makes her confession. The brief third section with its downward direction describes her clumsy gait as she trudges pathetically beside her lover awaiting his rejection. New melodic material in the fourth section reflects his unexpected tender response which then builds into a passionate climax. The final section symbolizes the transfiguration as the opening dark motifs for viola and cello are now translated for violin.

For those of you who might ponder the end of tonality as realized by Schoenberg in his later works, the composer himself offers the following explanation: "I was not destined to continue in the manner of *Verklärte Nacht* or even *Pelleas and Melisande*. The Supreme Commander had ordered me on a harder road." This harder road is subject for other notes on later works, but even with this youthful opus, let us be reminded of Schoenberg's enormous impact on twentieth-century music as well as his role as prophet. As Jan Swafford says so eloquently in his *Vintage Guide to Classical Music*: "Around Arnold Schoenberg, a lapsed Jew who was driven back to the faith, grew the chaos and anarchy that came to fruition in the Nazi era. He saw it all, felt it all, and resonated with it all. Eventually he would attack that chaos and anarchy with faith: faith in the God of the Old Testament and in a new way of composing music."

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Octet in F Major for Strings and Winds, Op. 166, D. 803 (1824)

Early in the year 1824 Schubert began to produce the series of chamber works which would place him in the company of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The immediate stimulus was his friendship with Ferdinand, Count Troyer, a clarinetist and high steward to the Archduke Rudolph, and Ignaz Schuppanzigh, first violinist of the quartet of the same name (Count Razumovsky's quartet), which had been intimately involved with Beethoven.

The *Octet* was commissioned by Troyer, and was performed by him with Schuppanzigh's quartet and other musicians in their circle, at a private home in Vienna, some time in the spring of 1824. The first public performance was at Schuppanzigh's subscription concert series three years later.

The terms of Troyer's commission are not known; the instrumentation of the *Octet* has no exact precedent, and it may have been by the Count's wish that the clarinet, rather than the flute or oboe, should be the leading wind instrument of the group. Whether on Troyer's initiative or his own, Schubert worked with a model - Beethoven's early *Septet, Op. 20* - which it resembles closely in instrumentation (plus an additional violin) and form. Like Beethoven's, this work harks back to an earlier, 18th-century tradition of outdoor music (serenades and divertimenti); instead of adopting the 4-movement structure standard for chamber works in his time, he followed a 6-movement pattern of those earlier forms; the later movements retain some of that flavor of light open-air entertainment. The result is an exquisite work of such rich invention, sublime melody and complexity of texture - unsurpassed in anything else he ever wrote - that one feels impelled speak about it at length.

An *Adagio* opens the first movement, introducing the string and wind choirs, a dotted-note figure which will be heard throughout the work, and the yearning chromatic chords that will recur in many forms. With eight independent parts at his disposal and almost unlimited variety of sonorities and texture, Schubert in this work will explore many little-used harmonic progressions and variations. The *Allegro* which follows is flavored with the more extroverted outdoor "band-music" - the side which will eventually prevail in the last movement.

The wonderful second movement is an abridged sonata form rather than the three-part song form Schubert usually preferred for his slow movements. It displays the instruments as soloists in a quite original way.

The lovely, languid melody, played first on the clarinet (for the Count who commissioned it, no doubt) with a rich string accompaniment, has identical first and last phrases; so when the first violin then repeats the melody, while the clarinet plays a counter-melody, the effect is at first that of a canon. When the section returns, it is now the violin that leads, with the counter-melody in the horn, then the cello and clarinet take up the pattern but in a different tonal region. Meanwhile phrases from the tune have been heard on the cello and double bass, supporting an endlessly delightful web of melodies. The accompaniment at last flows to a halt in the coda, and the violins and viola are left alone to begin a three-part canon on the melody, interrupted by a few bars of unexpected drama before the movement's peaceful close.

Of the work's two *minuet-trio* movements in the home key of F major, the first is a brisk, breezy and uniformly cheerful *scherzo*; the second a pastoral, reflective, true *minuet*, more adventurous in its tonality. The first treats the group once more as a "band" (with a string quartet in the *trio* section), the second highlights the clarinet, horn and violin as solo instruments.

Between these two movements comes the centerpiece of the work, the charming set of variations in C major on a melody from his own early opera *The Friends from Salamanca*. Here Schubert indulges to the full his wonderful melodic gifts. The theme, demure in its square 4-bar shape, rises to memorability with the totally unexpected high A just before the end of the melody. Var. 1 simply decorates the tune in triplets (three notes to a beat); Var. 2 continues more vigorously in the same rhythm, adding a jerky double-dotted effect, and lining up the cello with the three winds. In Var. 3, over a gurgling "little brook" accompaniment for the lower strings, the horn carries on a dialog with the clarinet and bassoon in octaves, interspersed with comments from the first violin. Var. 4 belongs chiefly to the cello, Var. 5 (in a minor key) to the winds. Instead of returning now to the expected C major, Schubert takes us into A-flat major – a tonally distant region – for Var. 6 in an ethereal contemplation by the clarinet and four upper strings. A link leads back to C major, where a boisterous Var. 7 leads into a long and surprisingly somber coda: the repeated low C's on the horn are almost sinister in effect, revealing deeper thoughts beneath the surface of pleasure and brilliance.

After the *minuet-trio* the sinister mood returns in the extraordinary slow introduction to the last movement. Because of the lack of clear precedent, the first listeners at this point must have felt a strong shiver of dismay and uncertainty: what on earth was Schubert up to with his

tremolandos and his ambiguous harmonies? But the storm quickly dies down; the three winds play a soaring *arpeggio* figure in the reassuring key of C major, and after a pause, the strings open the final *allegro* with a tune of cheekily irregular structure. The persistent quarter-note rhythm of the cello is kept up in one form or another through most of the movement, and is chiefly responsible for its abounding energy. The second subject, played in the winds after a pause, is the most conventionally “galant” of all the tunes in the *Octet* but the continuation is blessedly and unconventionally Schubertian. Near the end, the slow introduction returns with a new rushing figure for the first violin, but its terror has now been exposed as a make-believe, and we know that we will soon hear the proper comic-opera conclusion to this sublime work.

Program note adapted from Nicholas Temperley's essay for the Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

Concertante

XIAO-DONG WANG & ITTAI SHAPIRA, VIOLIN
RACHEL SHAPIRO & ARA GREGORIAN, VIOLA
ALEXIS PIA GERLACH & ZVI PLESSER, CELLO

with special guests performers:

KURT MUROKI, BASS
ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN, CLARINET
SHINYEE NA, BASSOON
CHEZY NIR, FRENCH HORN

Comprised of a core of six virtuoso string players, adding performers and instruments as needed, Concertante, has performed across America, gathering rave reviews. They have appeared on Minnesota Public Radio's *St. Paul Sunday*. Concertante performs regularly at Merkin Hall in New York City and at Rose Lehrman Arts Center in Harrisburg, PA. As solo performers who have won major national and international music competitions, each of the members has graced the premier stages of the world from New York's Carnegie Hall to London's Royal Festival Hall and Shanghai's Grand Theatre. Concertante performs a wide repertoire ranging from works of established masters to less commonly performed composers. The ensemble is interested in furthering new music and last season launched a new series entitled One Plus Five, a series of six world premieres for larger chamber groups. In addition to their many

premieres, they have offered infrequently performed chamber works by established composers such as Enesco, John Adams, Schönberg, Martinů and Schulhoff.

Tonight's members include: **Alexander Fiterstein**, clarinet. A first-prize winner of the Carl Nielsen International Clarinet Competition and the Young Concert Artist International, he has appeared as a solo recitalist and with many important orchestras around the world. He has performed with Daniel Barenboim, Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode, Emanuel Ax, Elena Bashkistrova and the American, Borromeo, Daedalus, Fine Arts, Jerusalem, and Mendelssohn String Quartets. Mr. Fiterstein was born in Belarus, raised in Israel, and now lives in New York.

Alexis Pia Gerlach, cello. Active as a soloist and chamber musician; cellist of the Trio Solisti. Her recordings of the Rachmaninoff and Franck Sonatas with pianist Fabio Bidini are released on the Encore Performance label. Her trio has appeared on the Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center, the Washington Performing Arts Society at The Kennedy Center, and at Weill Hall. Born in New York City, Ms. Gerlach studied with Aldo Parisot at Yale University and The Juilliard School.

Violinist and violist **Ara Gregorian** has appeared in recital in the major venues of New York City and as soloist with many orchestras throughout the United States. He studied at The Juilliard School with Joseph Fuchs, Harvey Shapiro, and Robert Mann and teaches at East Carolina University. He is the founder and director of the Four Seasons Chamber Music Festival of Eastern North Carolina.

Kurt Muroki, double base. A native of Maui, Hawaii, began violin studies at the age of 6, switching to the double bass at 13. At 17 he went to Juilliard studying with teacher/mentor Homer R. Mensch. He has played with a long list of major music organizations, large and small, and is also active playing movies, commercials, and popular concerts. He took first prize in the Aspen Music Festival double bass competition, and was the first bassist to win the New World Symphony concerto competition, and the Honolulu Symphony Young Artists competition. He currently teaches double base at the Bowdoin International Music Festival and is Adjunct Professor at The Juilliard School and the New Jersey City University.

Shinyee Na, bassoon, is a native of Taiwan. She came to the United States on scholarship to study with Rick Ranti and Richard Svoboda, assistant principal and principal bassoonists with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. While a Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Festival, she played under conductors Seiji Ozawa and Robert Spano. She has also performed chamber music at Marlboro Music Festival where she has

been a participant since 2002. Currently, Shinyee is a member of the Jacksonville Symphony orchestra and travels regularly to Europe and Asia to play chamber music.

Chezy Nir, horn. Mr. Nir serves as Principal Horn of the Israel Symphony Orchestra-Rishon Le'zion, the in-house orchestra of the New Israeli Opera since 1999. He has performed as soloist with most of Israel's leading orchestras and in recital in Israel and abroad. Mr. Nir studied with the late Meir Rimon at the Rubin Academy of Music, Tel-Aviv, and with Marie Luise Neunecker at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule in Germany. He is a founding member of the New Israel Woodwind Quintet, and Professor of Horn at the Buchman-Mehta Academy of Music at Tel-Aviv University, and the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.

Israeli cellist **Zvi Plessner** has an active career as soloist, chamber music player and teacher. As soloist he has performed with leading orchestras around the world and under conductors Zubin Mehta, Sir Neville Marriner and Sergiu Comissiona. He was a member of the Huberman String Quartet and is a founding member of Concertante. Mr. Plessner is a graduate of The Juilliard School as a student of Zara Nelsova. His principal teachers have included Zvi Harel in Israel and David Soyer in the United States. Mr. Plessner has taught at the North Carolina School of the Arts and is currently on the faculty of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.

Violist **Rachel Shapiro** is both chamber musician and teaching artist. She has appeared with the Daedalus Quartet, the Avalon Quartet, and with the Jerusalem Trio with which she has formed a piano quartet; at the same time she is co-founder of MishMash Music Company, a chamber music series designed to reinvigorate the concert-going experience by way of non-traditional, audience interactive programs. She is currently a Senior Teaching Artist for the New York Philharmonic School Partnership Program. Ms. Shapiro received both her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from The Juilliard School. See www.rsviola.com for more information.

Israeli violinist **Ittai Shapira** is an established soloist, having concertized with orchestras and music festivals over several continents. He is co-founder of the Ilona Feher Foundation for the development of young Israeli violinists. He studied in Israel with Ms. Feher, and in the United States with Dorothy DeLay and Robert Mann (The Juilliard School). Upcoming projects include a recording of his own "Concierto Latino" for violin as well as a CD with Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony.

Xiao-Dong Wang, violin, entered the Shanghai Conservatory of Music at the age of ten. He won first prize in the Menuhin International Violin Competition and another first prize in the Wieniawski-Lipinski International Violin Competition at thirteen and fifteen. During a 1985 trip to England, he met Dorothy DeLay of The Juilliard School, who arranged a four-year scholarship beginning in 1986. Mr. Wang has soloed with major orchestras around the world, and has recorded the Bartók *Concerto No. 2* and Szymanowski *Concerto No. 1*. He appears on both violin and viola in important chamber music venues in the United States and elsewhere.

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